

PRESS RELEASE

On June 26, 2008, the United States Ambassador to Burundi, Patricia N. Moller, took part in a ribbon cutting ceremony to mark the official opening of three bridges in the Giheta neighborhood of Gitega province and Kibimbu Center in the Kayokwe neighborhood of Mwaro province. These three bridges -- Nyakijandi, Casama, and Martyazo -- were completed in May 2008 with a U.S. \$10,100 grant from the Ambassador's Special Self-Help Fund.

Floods destroyed previous bridges in these locations several years ago, severely restricting inhabitants' access to schools, clinics, and markets. The new bridges are made of stronger materials and were built with reinforced construction techniques to withstand future flooding. The United States is pleased to support this project and believes that these bridges will help stimulate the local economy while improving access to markets, education and health care for the local communities.

The Ambassador's Special Self-Help Fund focuses on helping communities to help themselves. The U.S. Government funds small but important projects to assist people to play an active role in their community's own development. Every project must have a strong element of community involvement. Some examples of previous projects include building a pottery-training center for Twa women in Muramvya Province; supporting drinking water projects for more than 25,000 people in Rutana and Ngozi Provinces; constructing a primary school for 250 students in Buterere; and supporting an animal husbandry project for blind children in Gitega. Applications to the Self-Help Fund are evaluated objectively based on the details of the project and weighed against State Department guidelines.

The bridge-building project is a collaborative effort illustrating the partnership between the people of the United States and the people of Burundi. U.S. Government funds were used to purchase and transport construction materials. The Burundian partner, the Association for the Solidarity of the Civil Servants of Mbongora (Association pour la Solidarité des Fonctionnaires de Mbongora, or ASSOFOM), supervised construction of the bridges, while community members provided labor to complete the project. The Association is not affiliated with any particular group, and membership is open to everyone. ASSOFOM is located in Mbogora Parish in Mwaro province and represents Nyabihanga, Ndava and Kayokwa neighborhoods.

For more information about the U.S. Ambassador's Special Self-Help Fund, please visit the U.S. Embassy's website at <http://burundi.usembassy.gov/resources/public-diplomacy/programs/special-self-help-fund.html> or call the Self-Help Coordinator at (+257) 22-207-000.